

1996

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Recommended Citation

Gilbert, Helen, GI Joe Versus Digger Dave: Contemporary Australian Drama and the Vietnam War, *Kunapipi*, 18(2), 1996.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol18/iss2/32>

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Abstract

Maurie McNarn's argument that Australia's '[i]nvolvement in Vietnam was the climax of the shift from dependence upon Britain, as an Imperial appendage, to alliance with America, as a satellite'¹ is now commonplace, and most historians agree that the same colonialist mentality has governed both patterns of allegiance. The anti-Americanism that characterized our Vietnam period, and which persists in various watered-down forms today, can be seen as 'the latest version of post-colonial defiance which [is] itself the reverse side of Antipodean dependency'.² The contemporary theatrical response to Australian intervention in Vietnam attests not only to the complexities of such a positioning in Asian-Pacific politics but also to the dilemma of representation that inevitably faces a culture which has 'relied all too heavily on a military [patriarchal] past for images of national character'.³

a> august mobilisation to end the war in Vietnam



SUNDAY AUGUST 13th 'AT 2.00 pm SYDNEY

CITY MARCH: Assemble corner of Liverpool & College Sts. Departs 2.00 pm. PUBLIC RALLY: Rushcutters Bay Stadium 3.00 pm.

HELEN GILBERT

GI Joe Versus Digger Dave: Contemporary Australian Drama and the Vietnam War

It was wonderful to find America, but it would have been more wonderful to miss it.

(Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*)

Maurie McNarn's argument that Australia's '[i]nvolvement in Vietnam was the climax of the shift from dependence upon Britain, as an Imperial appendage, to alliance with America, as a satellite'¹ is now commonplace, and most historians agree that the same colonialist mentality has governed both patterns of allegiance. The anti-Americanism that characterized our Vietnam period, and which persists in various watered-down forms today, can be seen as 'the latest version of post-colonial defiance which [is] itself the reverse side of Antipodean dependency'.² The contemporary theatrical response to Australian intervention in Vietnam attests not only to the complexities of such a positioning in Asian-Pacific politics but also to the dilemma of representation that inevitably faces a culture which has 'relied all too heavily on a military [patriarchal] past for images of national character'.³ Although the Vietnam experience invites an interrogation of the masculinist hegemony which has informed accounts of earlier wars and which still undergirds constructions of our most enduring national hero, the Anzac/Digger, in general there has not been a significant revisioning of this figure in the literature about the period.⁴ That Vietnam has become, in Robin Gerster's terms, a sort of 'military pariah' while Gallipoli 'remains sacrosanct',⁵ seems related to the perception that we fought the American way of war in Vietnam and not the Australian way as we had at Gallipoli. Dennis Phillips argues that this also explains why 'Australians as a whole have shown little inclination to remember the Vietnam war, to evaluate the experience, or to try to draw historical lessons from it'.⁶ Phillips is both right and wrong, for although this war 'has not had the cumulative social impact in Australia that it has had in the United States',⁷ it remains a site of rupture in our nation's (hi)story and a signal event which continues to inflect upon our constructions of both Asia and America, the latter often troped as posing a cultural and ideological threat which is far more pernicious than the feared spread of

Asian communism. Australia, meanwhile, figures ambivalently in many critical reassessments of the period, often exculpated of guilt for its aggression towards Vietnam but at the same time vilified for its status as 'lackey' to yet another imperial power.

This paper focuses mainly on two plays which dramatize the power relations at issue in the story of Vietnam. Using a post-colonial theoretical framework, it investigates textual responses to this controversial war and also speculates on how performance reflects and/or critiques concepts of national culture/character as imaged through the Aussie Digger (Dave), the Yankee GI (Joe), and Uncle Sam himself. As well as examining representations of American neo-imperialism, I also explore relationships between the Western allies and highlight the ways in which their competitive masculinities are mediated through discourses that hover obsessively, if sometimes covertly, around the body/text of 'woman' as a site of conquest.

As an unresolved issue, Vietnam haunts a number of contemporary plays, (dis)appearing in the margins as a site of repressed trauma which frequently attenuates the social and psychological growth of individuals and/or groups. Stephen Sewell's *The Blind Giant is Dancing* (1983) and Michael Gow's *Away* (1986)⁸ both feature dysfunctional characters whose guilt at having sent their sons to Vietnam emblemizes a wider psychic stress over our nation's failure to resist the tide of American imperialism. Most notably, Louis Nowra's work exhibits a recurrent and intense interest in the subject of Vietnam although this is often communicated by visual resonance rather than direct reference. If the apocalyptic landscape of *Inside the Island* (1980) remembers Gallipoli,⁹ it also conjures the killing fields of My Lai, as does the nuclear inferno imaged in *Sunrise* (1983). In this play, Nowra makes the Vietnam link explicit through the figure of the gardener, Ly, a shell-shocked Vietnamese refugee who cowers trembling when the helicopters fly overhead, but it is not until *Cosi* (1992) that Nowra mentions American imperialism in Vietnam, and then only briefly. Other dramatists take a slightly different tack, seeming to engage directly with the central debates raised by Australian participation in that 'dirty capitalist war', but ultimately using Vietnam as a pressurised space to sharpen more personal conflicts. This pattern is evident in Nick Enright's recent *Bildungsdrama, St James Infirmary* (1992), which situates the emotional and political crises of its rebel schoolboy protagonist within the framework of the 1960s Australian protest movement. In all of these texts, Vietnam is somehow displaced from centre-stage, included as an unnameable anxiety or referred to in passing but not dwelt on for long.¹⁰

Notwithstanding the probable connections between Vietnam and the sustained attack on American hegemony expressed in *The Blind Giant is Dancing*, it is curious that playwrights such as Sewell, Nowra and Gow, who have elsewhere been chroniclers and re-interpreters of the broader

canvas of Australian history, and mordant critics of imperialism, have not seized more directly upon Vietnam as a dramatic subject.¹¹ In a 1983 interview with Jeremy Ridgman, Sewell and Nowra identified it as one of the 'central experiences' of our culture. Sewell states:

The interest in Vietnam for me goes back to a sense of shame; about how the crime was committed against the Vietnamese people and how we participated in that crime. No acknowledgment has been made at the level of culture, let alone in reparations, after we participated in the devastation of that country.¹²

Nowra adds that

It was a dubious and immoral war, especially from the point of view of Australia. We were a participant, not from ideas of honour or moral commitment or beliefs, but from a cringing necessity to align ourselves with a big boy power.¹³

Neither playwright shies away from confronting the fact of Australia's willing participation in Vietnam and together they highlight the complex power relations at issue in the whole conflict. That their planned collaboration on a Vietnam play has not eventuated suggests, nevertheless, the acute difficulty which this subject poses.

Of the few contemporary plays which do focus squarely on the significance of the Vietnam experience for the wider Australian community, Rob George's *Sandy Lee Live at Nui Dat* (1981) provides the most thorough-going indictment of American imperialism.¹⁴ In his preface to the published text, the playwright claims that the events of the 1960s precipitated the 'Americanisation of Australia in a way that had never been known before'.¹⁵ He explores this phenomenon on a number of levels by examining those who participated in the Vietnam war, those who protested against it, and those who profited by it. What is most distinctive about this text is its cognition that we have become neo-colonials – or 'Coca-Colonials' – through active consent. As Beryl Langer argues in her discussion of American hegemony, '[w]e tend to conceptualize our status as colonized subjects in terms of a discourse of cultural imperialism which constructs our relation to the United States as one of domination/oppression. What this leaves out is the extent of our own complicity'.¹⁶ Rob George's play is very much about this complicity even though it is openly anti-American. Its exploration of the Vietnam experience is developed not only in direct debates about neo-imperialism but also through a non-naturalistic mode which uses parody, song, and agit-prop theatre to underscore criticism of all factions. The play's overt theatricality is particularly apposite for its subject since to many the war seemed like a badly managed stage production. Gerster describes Australia's participation in these terms:

This was not the starring role and triumphant curtain call in a drama of clearly

demarcated 'good' versus 'evil' to which Australians – thanks largely to the zeal of mythmakers like the First World War Official Historian C.E.W. Bean – had become accustomed ... Australians in Vietnam were 'a side show ... a walk-on part in an expensive production.' To use a squib in vogue during the conflict, the whole sorry performance seemed to prove that Australia really was 'The Lackey Country'.¹⁷

The protest movement, with its carefully orchestrated performances – the public burning of conscription papers is a case in point – was also styled according to theatrical paradigms, albeit of a different kind.

George's play sketches its characters in terms of broad stereotype and its structure is loosely documentary, developing in juxtaposition three distinct narratives which eventually merge. No Americans or Vietnamese actually appear in the text; the emphasis is on how these 'others' are constructed and positioned within the neo-colonial triangle created by our involvement in what is seen as America's war in Vietnam. On the home front, the action revolves around the presentation of a number of pieces of street theatre by the anti-war agitators, university students Peter and Pat, along with a focus on their political ideologies as revealed in less public moments. Using the parlance of the period, these two characters articulate a vehement protest against the American invasion of South-East Asia. Well-worn slogans such as 'Read about American war crimes' and 'Smash US imperialism' resonate throughout their rather crudely staged demonstrations, but the playwright is careful to point out that even the theatre of protest has a distinctly American flavour. Hence Peter's (unoriginal) idea to make a show of burning his call-up papers is treated with a degree of cynicism. That his 'symbolic gesture' goes entirely unnoticed suggests that mindless emulations of American models of (mis)behaviour are both ineffective and anything but revolutionary.

Elsewhere in the play, the use of street theatre reveals something of the mechanisms by which Australians construct themselves *vis à vis* their Yankee allies/enemies. Theatrical signifiers like costume and accent become important in delineating national identities since the Australian-American contrast lacks a paradigm of racial difference to make visible that sense of essential 'otherness' which aides self-definition. When Peter and Pat perform a routine while decked out as 'Uncle Sam' and 'Vietnam' respectively, the play illustrates, by dint of metatheatrical emphasis on their artifice, how costume grafts particular characteristics onto the performing body rather than simply functioning as a neutral device that 'blends straggling physiological signifiers so that they contribute to character'.¹⁸ Peter's costume is intended to be highly evocative, suggesting militarism and political coercion, as well as more covert forms of cultural dominance. Uncle Sam is also very much a showbiz figure who reminds us that American hegemony operates through popular culture and the media. Hence his song has the structure and tone of an advertising jingle, as does Vietnam's reply:

TWO YEARS GAOL



**GEOFF MULLEN
TO BE GAOLED FOR
DRAFT RESISTANCE**

DEMONSTRATE

**MARCH LEAVES
MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY
MARCH 24TH 2.30**



Sandy Lee live at Nui Dat

PETER [as Uncle Sam]: Howdy doody, hello ma'am
 You can call me Uncle Sam
 I am big and I am strong
 I've come to kill the Viet Cong
 I'll teach you all what's right and wrong
 Come to save you Vietnam
 So come up here and let's shake hands.

PAT [as Vietnam]: Thank you for your offer, friend,
 But on ourselves we will depend.
 We know our house is far from calm,
 But we want peace and not napalm.
 Yes, we want peace for Vietnam.
 So give us food and we'll say thanks,
 Don't sell us your expensive tanks. (pp. 10-11)

Punctuated by Uncle Sam pointing a revolver straight at Vietnam's head (See p. 298), Peter's and Pat's performance is unequivocal in its positioning of America as an imperial power to be resisted at all costs. The gender codes are abundantly clear: male America stands poised to rape and/or murder a female Vietnam. However, since this scenario also uses visual and aural cues suggestive of an American-style sketch, its real subversiveness turns on the question of appropriation, that is, on whether the students actively seize upon the (stage) languages of the American protest and Australianize them or whether they simply reproduce borrowed tropes. I would argue that George's careful delineation of Pat, the questioner, from Peter, the mimic man, ensures that such scenes operate counter-discursively because at least one of the pair seems fully aware of the hegemony of American discourse whether it peddles war or peace. Hence, the overall function of street theatre in this play seems to be to relocate the enemy as rhetoric itself. This move approximates what Peter Pierce terms the 'tertiary stage' of Australian representations of the enemy in war literature, the stage wherein 'language itself ... comes to be recognised both as foe and as a major casualty of modern war'.¹⁹

The war narrative of *Sandy Lee Live at Nui Dat* concentrates on Australian imperialism in Vietnam, avoiding the common temptation to project our national guilt over the war on to the Americans. While their 'pacification' of a whole village certainly triggers the events which lead to the final catastrophic murder/suicide, it is clear that at least some of the Australian soldiers not only condone such violence but also (mis)use it for their own purposes. In particular, the play reveals how the (hi)story of Vietnam is shaped by the story-tellers in ways that support personal agendas. Hence, the mercenary, Ted, reports the pacification in order to crush Bruce's romantic dreams while the third soldier, Gordon, later appropriates Bruce's grief to concoct a credible tale that will convince the protesters of his anti-American stance. Gordon's disingenuous pose is of

course radically undermined by the fact that he depends on the GIs to facilitate his drug-trafficking, a point which emphasizes how the graft and corruption associated with the Vietnam war is widespread rather than simply confined to the Americans. Although this section of the play is no less trenchant in its critique of U.S. imperialism, George also directs our focus towards the discursive representation of that imperialism. Here, as in the protest narrative, it is our own complicity with the American way of war/words that is highlighted.

The Vietnam scenes also communicate the Australians' anxiety about their official position as U.S. allies in a war where the antonyms 'friend' and 'enemy' are no longer polar points in a binary opposition, and where the racial 'other' refuses simple categorization. The mistrust which ensues in such situations is aptly described by a 1960s news report:

The Vietnamese hate the Americans. The Americans hate the Vietnamese. Americans hate other Americans. The local Chinese are hated by both the Vietnamese and the Americans. The Australians hate everybody.²⁰

This certainly seems applicable to most of the soldiers in George's play. Gordon's comment that the Diggers are 'open season for Charlie and Uncle Sam and every slope-eyed bastard [they] come across' (p.29) reveals not only his racism but a deep confusion over how the enemy might be confidently identified. The result is a solipsistic retreat into self-delusion or cynicism. Through the figure of the soldier doubly alienated from his nominal allies and his fellow Australians, the play dismantles the myth of mateship which undergirds the Digger legend, especially since George refuses to present images/myths of a revenant soldiery which will exonerate the Australians, or to sanitise the war narrative by filtering it through the discourses of Gallipoli. Instead, it makes a point of deconstructing the Anzac myth by showing how the 'innocent' and youthful bush balladeer, Bruce, is anything but a modern version of his heroic prototype, for he is neither courageous nor self-sacrificing, and, crucially, by his obsessive love/lust for a Vietnamese woman, he calls into question his fealty to his 'mates'.

While Bruce is the one soldier to draw our empathy, his fetishisation and appropriation of his Vietnamese lover is severely criticized. He might profess undying devotion to Lai Dai, but it is quite obviously his own construction of her as a Madonna figure which fuels his love, a point stressed, when he reveals that he does not even know her real name. That he simply 'makes up' a new name for her denies her subjectivity, and demonstrates the linguistic interpellation of the racial and sexual 'other' that is characteristic of imperial patriarchy. Similarly, his plans to bring Lai Dai to Australia suggest that she is merely a commodity to be imported at will. The particularly sexual nature of Australian imperialism in Asia is clearly expressed by Ted's satirical response to Bruce's query about why they are in Vietnam at all: 'It's actually all just a great big

lonely hearts club where poor unattached males like you get to meet beautiful Asian girls in the romantic, exotic and colourful Far East' (p. 25). Thus the play makes explicit the generic links between the war narrative and the traveller's tale,²¹ positioning the Australian soldiers as Occidental (sex) tourists whose invasion of Asia is the predictable outcome of a wider desire for self-authentication through conquest of the passive Oriental 'other'. That Bruce's orientalist fantasy devolves into a 'bad trip' which leaves him 'travel sick' is one of the major ironies of the Vietnam experience/tour.

Where the Americans fit in this paradigm is slightly less clear, but I would argue that a large part of the Australians' antipathy towards them can be traced to genital anxieties about their own sexual potency. This view is supported by Ted's aggressively dismissive construction of Lai Dai as a 'whore' who 'chat[s] up the Yank generals' (p. 27), and by the ways in which the Australians compare themselves repeatedly to the Americans in what could be sexual terms of reference: 'Is it true that us Aussies are six times better than the Yank soldiers?' asks Bruce (p. 14). Significantly, Digger Dave and GI Joe never seem to meet in the flesh, or at least this is not detailed by the play, but in the complex story of Vietnam, the female body becomes a space on and through which the competitive national masculinities/sexualities of Australia and America are contested.²²

If the war scenes of *Sandy Lee Live at Nui Dat* reveal the sexual imperative of Australia's neo-imperialism in Asia, the third narrative thread of the play, which focuses on the pop singer, Sandy Lee, shows another kind of economic exploitation. Sandy Lee's career exemplifies capitalism's most insidious workings, not only because her tours to the military camps in Vietnam take on a progressively opportunistic bent, but also because her music and her public rhetoric justify Australian participation in the war. By setting her nauseatingly patriotic songs in ironic counterpoint to the students' protest ditties, the play strips her form of entertainment of its apolitical masquerade and positions the singer as yet another conduit for American hegemony. A sitting target for parody, Sandy Lee functions as a site of anti-war discourse, but she is also an ambiguous figure who elicits some sympathy because she is obviously a victim of the very imperial and patriarchal systems she supports. This is particularly evident in the way that she too is situated as the fetishized object of the male gaze, constructed by Bruce as a surrogate for the beautiful Lai Dai, and by Ted as 'a pretty round-eyed sheila' who will remind the soldiers 'that the army does, after all, care for them' (pp. 9-10). Within the overall scheme of the play, however, Sandy emerges as a callous character and one who practises the worst kind of denial. Even though, in an unguarded moment, she articulates most fully the moral futility of the Vietnam 'tour' of duty, it seems she has learnt little from her travels. That her closing number is a song stolen from Bruce and

introduced by an announcer with a phoney American accent reminds us that Sandy Lee shows the ugly face of Australia's neo-colonial experience in Vietnam, the pervasive cultural 'Coca Cola-nisation' which is the enduring legacy of our American dreams.

Rob George's honest, complex and entertaining assessment of Australia's complicity with American imperialism in Asia should have sparked more interest in our theatre circles than it did, and it is regrettable that some of the prickly issues he raises have not been fully canvassed in a number of more recent plays about Australia's ongoing and problematic role in Asian-Pacific politics. A brief analysis of Barry Lowe's *Tokyo Rose* (1989) illustrates how the imperative to distance ourselves from American neo-colonialism can result in a figural displacement of our own economic, military and sexual aggression towards various Asian countries. Although set during World War Two and ostensibly about the trial of a Japanese-American woman suspected by the U.S. of treason, *Tokyo Rose* has the ambience of a Vietnam protest play. Its quasi-documentary structure and burlesque musical style, along with an extended focus on the figure of Uncle Sam, invites comparisons with *Sandy Lee Live at Nui Dat*. In particular, the savage anti-Americanism of *Tokyo Rose* seems commensurate with a post-Vietnam assessment of the U.S. imperium as does the play's portrait of a feminine Japan/Asia victimized by the menacing Uncle Sam. Lowe's inclusion of an Australian soldier as the adventitious 'innocent abroad', combined with costume and scene designs which emphasize contrasts between the Aussie khaki and the Yankee red, white and blue, completes the picture of a refracted and displaced Vietnam narrative.²³

Like George, Lowe is intensely interested in exploring the rhetorical and theatrical power of American popular entertainment and in showing how its tropes can be deployed to critique U.S. imperialism. In the first half of the play, he presents the (hi)story of Iva Toguri, the woman framed as Tokyo Rose, within the framework of a proposed musical being put together by a smooth-talking American, Carroll, who appropriates Iva's experience for his 'exotic' new show. Carroll presents himself as the quintessential Broadway entrepreneur, 'the body merchant' and 'connoisseur of female flesh', who will 'turn Iva's life-story into the sensation it should be'.²⁴ The mutability of this kind of war history (his/tory) is clearly demonstrated as Carroll experiments with a number of ideas and theatrical images, censoring Iva's tale unless it is contingent with his own vision. Of course, his blatantly artificial reconstruction of Iva/Tokyo Rose is specifically designed to expose his own biases, and on a broader level, to critique the racism and sexism of his society; however, despite the play's metatheatre, or maybe because of it, the audience is easily persuaded that such distortions of history are the precinct of the Americans. What is missing from the performance's self-reflexive focus on the making of history/theatre is the sense that the

audience is always implicated in that process. Whereas *Sandy Lee Live at Nui Dat* challenges Australian spectators with uncomfortable reminders of our likeness to the Americans, *Tokyo Rose* reassures us of our difference.

The play's construction of Uncle Sam as Iva's corrupt and malicious prosecutor similarly distances us from the American-style (in)justice meted out by the judges, bureaucrats and politicians whose prejudices deny her a fair trial. When he brands her a 'dastardly slur on the lives of other women' (p. 37) and a 'female Nipponese turncoat' (p. 57), Uncle Sam only reveals his own misogyny, while his accusation that Iva is a 'vicious propagandist' has more than a hint of irony (p. 39). Always appearing in full stars-and-stripes regalia and present on stage for most of the action, Uncle Sam is a grotesque parody of American culture. Once again, costume is used as a visible hook which allows the audience's immediate recognition of cultural stereotypes (See p. 304). As in George's play, Uncle Sam is very much the performer, the master of showbiz who weeps theatrically at will, the media hack who 'speaks like a TV promo' (p. 43), and at the same time, a threatening patriarchal presence who represents the military might of the U.S.A. But because we are never made aware that someone is also playing the part of Uncle Sam, unlike in Rob George's text where Peter's 'act' is encoded as an entirely visible piece of (meta)theatre, Lowe's Uncle Sam character, despite his artificiality, is naturalized as the average American. Hollow to the core, a simulacrum, a play of surface images, he embodies Australia's post-modern nightmare, but the reasons behind this *post-colonial* construction of America are rarely examined, when perhaps they should be.

For the purposes of this discussion, I have privileged George's account of American neo-imperialism over that of Lowe because the former shows an acute awareness of that complex ambivalence which results from our partial identification with *and* simultaneous disavowal of the colonizing culture. *Tokyo Rose* is, nevertheless, an important text in so far as it recognizes and satirizes Orientalist discourses, and undermines the disciplinary regimes, both rhetorical and corporeal, through which American militarism attempts to bring the destabilizing difference of the racial/sexual 'other' under its control. As far as Australian-American relationships are concerned, however, perhaps the real subversion of the play lies in Lowe's deliberate appropriation of American theatrical tropes – the Uncle Sam figure, the Broadway razzamatazz, the musical chorus – to create a strongly anti-American play. If, as Homi Bhabha posits, '[t]he *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority',²⁵ *Tokyo Rose's* replication of American generic conventions surely provides a grotesque mirror that refracts inherited stage traditions even while attempting to emulate them.

That the dramas discussed generally enact their more penetrating



Tokyo Rose

critiques of the Vietnam war by examining it in some relation to American imperialism is a result not only of the historical circumstance of U.S. military intervention in the Asia-Pacific region but also of Australia's own ambivalences in dealing with its near neighbours. While we have long perceived the importance of having Western allies to protect our privileged position in what is essentially a non-Western region, we do not want the dependency, servility, and competition that such a relationship implies. Pierce's argument that Australia's bitter resentment of American neo-colonialism (compared to its tolerance of British colonialism) stems from the absence of 'countervailing forces of Empire loyalty',²⁶ tells only half the story. The other half, as Jeff Doyle avers, is that our anti-Americanism:

betrays the insecurity of Australia's movement from an inward looking, conservative and comfortable nation aspiring to an Anglo-European culture long since passed, to a player of whatever calibre on the world stage and in particular on the stage of Asia-Pacific matters. That move had been and remains troubling and problematic.²⁷

If our ambivalence towards the United States remains unresolved, as the theatrical treatment of Vietnam suggests, this attests to the complexity of the colonialisms which have impacted upon Australian history and which continue to shape its contours.

Plays mentioned in text but not listed in bibliographical notes:
 Nick Enright, *St James Infirmary* (Sydney: Currency, 1993).
 Michael Gow, *Away* (Sydney: Currency, 1986).
 Louis Nowra, *Inside the Island* (Sydney: Currency, 1981).
 Louis Nowra, *Sunrise* (Sydney: Currency, 1983).
 Louis Nowra, *Cosi* (Sydney: Currency, 1992).
 Stephen Sewell, *The Blind Giant is Dancing* (Sydney: Currency, 1983).

NOTES

1. Maurie McNarn, 'From Imperial Appendage to American Satellite: Australian Involvement in Vietnam', *Australian National University Historical Journal*, 14 (1979-80), p. 73.
2. Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia* (Melbourne: Oxford, 1992), p. 119.
3. John Murphy, 'Like Outlaws: Australian Narratives from the Vietnam War', *Meanjin*, 46, 2 (1987), p. 153.
4. It could be argued that many recent Australian narratives about World War One are deeply inflected by the Vietnam conflict although few show direct cognisance of its legacy. In particular, attempts to revivify the Anzac legend, as evident in a number of 1980s novels and films, can be linked to an anxiety about the erosion of the heroic soldier ideal, which resulted from our experience of Vietnam. Similar anxieties have energised the recent media coverage of events relating to our military history, for example, the 75th anniversary of Gallipoli in April 1990, and the return of the body of the Unknown Australian Soldier to the Canberra War Memorial in late 1993. Such celebrations of the soldier figure, as Susan Jeffords has argued in her book, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) suggests a reordering of the gender relations that feminism has threatened over the last quarter-century.
5. Robin Gerster, 'The Gallipoli Glut', *Australian Book Review*, 90 (1987), p. 30.
6. Dennis Phillips, *Ambivalent Allies: Myth and Reality in the Australian-American Relationship* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1988), p. 134.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
8. Dates given for plays in parentheses in the main body of this paper refer to the premiere performance. All page references are to the published texts.
9. See Veronica Kelly's article, 'Lest We Forget': Louis Nowra's *Inside the Island*, in this volume.
10. A variant response on this theme can be identified in Janis Balodis's representation of war in *Too Young for Ghosts* (Sydney: Currency, 1985). Here, although Vietnam is never mentioned, the portrayal of the Americans as openly predatory and violent suggests that the play's World War Two narrative has been adapted to fit the contingencies of the post-Vietnam era.
11. Nor has John Romeril re-visited this subject directly, although his work figured prominently in the theatre of the Vietnam period, mainly in the form of agit-prop protests against Australian internalisation of American hegemony, as demonstrated by sketches such as *The American Independence Hour* (1969) and *Chicago, Chicago* (1970). It could be argued, however, that his 1989 play, *Top End* (unpublished) draws deliberate parallels between Vietnam and the

- war in East Timor. See Gareth Griffiths, 'John Romeril's Wars: The Dissenting View', in this volume.
12. Jeremy Ridgman, 'Interview: Louis Nowra, Stephen Sewell and Neil Armfield', *Australasian Drama Studies*, 1, 2 (1982), p. 122.
 13. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
 14. Other notable plays of the 1980s which take Vietnam as their central subject include Rosemary John's *Luck of the Draw* (Sydney: Currency, 1985), about two veteran soldiers in the post-war era, and *Dustoff Vietnam* (unpublished, 1988), a play put together by Darwin veterans and local Vietnamese residents. Both include Vietnamese characters and deal, to some extent, with the ongoing problem of Australian racism but do not examine American imperialism in any detailed way.
 15. Rob George, *Sandy Lee Live at Nui Dat* (Sydney: Currency, 1982), p. vii. Further references to this play are given in the text.
 16. Beryl Langer, 'The Real Thing: Cliff Hardy and Coca Cola-nisation', *Span*, 31 (1991), p. 31.
 17. Robin Gerster, 'The Least Popular War', *Australian Book Review*, 95 (1987), p. 10.
 18. Jane Gaines, 'Costume and Narrative: How Dress Tells the Woman's Story', in Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog, eds., *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 193.
 19. Peter Pierce, 'Perceptions of the Enemy in Australian War Literature', *Australian Literary Studies*, 12, 2 (1985), p. 172. According to Pierce, the first stage confidently locates the enemy 'in the opposing battlelines' while in the second, he is also 'discovered elsewhere', mainly as a cowardly profiteer.
 20. Anon., quoted in Peter Pierce, 'Australian and American Literature of the Vietnam War', in Peter Pierce, Jeffrey Grey and Jeff Doyle, eds., *Vietnam Days: Australia and the Impact of Vietnam* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1991), p. 262.
 21. Robin Gerster explores this link in detail by examining the history of Australia's involvement in overseas wars which offered not only the chance of heroism but also the attraction of foreign travel. See his article, 'Occidental Tourists: The "Ugly Australian" in Vietnam War Narrative', in Peter Pierce, Jeffrey Grey and Jeff Doyle, eds., *Vietnam Days: Australia and the Impact of Vietnam* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1991), pp. 191-235. See also Richard White, 'The Soldier as Tourist: The Australian Experience of the Great War' in this volume.
 22. Similar paradigms of gender/nation are characteristic of many accounts of the Australian-American alliance during World War Two, particularly in reference to the GI invasion of our shores in the early 1940s. See, for example, John Hammond Moore's book, *Over-Sexed, Over-Paid and Over Here: Americans in Australia 1941-1945* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1981), and the plays, *Dinkum Assorted* by Linda Aronson (Sydney: Currency, 1989) and *No Names ... No Pack Drill* by Bob Herbert (Sydney: Currency, 1980). In these texts, Australian women function as arbiters of the competing versions of masculinity embodied by the Aussie Digger and the Yankee GI, and they are expected to exercise probity in their choices. At the same time, women are troped as the trouble spots of our defence system. Vulnerable and potentially treacherous, they threaten to compromise the moral fabric of our society and to become conduits for a dirty American capitalism which trades in sex, nylons and perfume.
 23. My discussion of *Tokyo Rose* is largely based on its premiere production in Brisbane. Directed by Jim Vile, La Boite Theatre, 2 November 1989.
 24. Barry Lowe, *Tokyo Rose* (unpublished script, 1989), p. 2. All further references to this play are included in the text.

25. Homi Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', *October*, 28 (1984), p. 129.
26. Peter Pierce, 'Perceptions of the Enemy in Australian War Literature', *Australian Literary Studies*, 12, 2 (1985), p. 180.
27. Jeff Doyle, 'Dismembering the Anzac Legend: Australian Popular Culture and the Vietnam War', *Vietnam Generation*, 3, 2 (1991), p. 119.

RICHARD TIPPING

VIETGRAM: 1968

WE HAVE BEEN SOLD OUT DEAR PEOPLE DEAR JUMBLED
CITY AND GUMTREE PEOPLE WE HAVE BEEN AUCTIONED
OFF FOR TEN THOUSAND SQUARE SUBURBS OF DEAD
CARS OR THREE FOR EVERY TWO CONSCRIPTS WHO LOVE
THEIR COUNTRY MORE THAN THE DIRTY YELLOW CANCER
OF COMMUNISM ADVANCING AT THIS VERY MOMENT ON A
UNITED FRONT THEY MAY BE SMALL BUT THEY ARE
HUNGRY AS WE ALL KNOW DEAR SUNBURNT AND KANGAROO
PEOPLE A PRIME MINISTER RETURNED IN HUMILITY TO
THE SEA THAT DROWNS ALL EVENTUALLY WHILE HIS
DAME WEPT AND BOUNCED BACK BUT MEANWHILE THE
BOMBS STILL FALL ACCORDING TO THE RAGGED LAWS
OF WESTERN GRAVITY BUY A BADGE AND BOMB A CHILD
SIR LEAP SCREAM OR JUMP DOWN THE LEFTWING THROATS
SPREADING SUBVERSIVE AND SEDITIOUS LITERATURE HOW
TO SPREAD A PEANUT BUTTER SANDWICH ON CRACKED
DUPLICATORS AT MIDNIGHT LONELY THROWING THEIR
WEIGHT AROUND DEAR SUBURBAN AND RETURNED PEOPLE
THIS IS NOT A QUESTION OF BEEF EXPORTS OR
PROTECTION ALTHOUGH PERHAPS YOUR MEMORIAL UGLY
HALLS KEEP THE PAIN OUT BUT THAT IS ANOTHER
QUESTION SO ELECT YOUR VOICES AND SHUT UP AS
CANBERRA IS OF COURSE COMPETENT TO DEAL WITH THE
SITUATION ANCIENT BACKBENCHERS THUMP BANDAGED FISTS
AND DRINK ONEHANDED ACROSS THE HALFSYLLABLES OF
DEMOCRACY HUNTED OUT IN MYSTERIOUS CORRIDORS
INEVITABLE OFFICES DEAR TILED AND NEATLAWN PEOPLE
YOU SAY THE STOBIE POLES MAY NOT BE BEAUTIFUL BUT
THEY ARE STRONG TO HANG THE WEIGHT OF CHILDREN

NOTES: *Conscripts* National service was introduced for males aged 19, who were selected through a lottery system of birthdates. Many of the 500 Australian soldiers killed in Vietnam were conscripts. This poem was written as a telegram when the poet was 18. *Returned people* refers to the R.S.L., the Returned Servicemen's League, a politically conservative force. *Backbenchers* members of Parliament not in the Cabinet *Prime Minister* Harold Holt, who welcomed the closing of defence ties with the United States and committed Australian troops (only after beef exports had been threatened) and drowned while surfing. The *Women's Weekly* magazine reported that his wife, Dame Zara Holt had 'bounced back'. *Stobie poles* Electricity poles prevalent in the streets *Drink onehanded* refers to accusations by Liberal Member Andrew Jones that half of the Parliamentarians in the Federal Parliament in Canberra, were 'half drunk half the time' - quickly denied